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A Mirror of Soviet Dissent

UNCENSORED RUSSIA: PROTEST AND DISSENT IN THE SOVIET UNION: THE UNOFFICIAL MOSCOW JOURNAL *A CHRONICLE OF CURRENT EVENTS*. Edited, translated and with a commentary by Peter Reddaway. Foreword by Julius Telesin. New York: American Heritage Press, 1972. 499 pp. \$10.00.

Peter Reddaway has translated the first eleven issues of the *Chronicle of Current Events*, dating from April 1968 to December 1969. The *Chronicle* is, as the title page somewhat quaintly announces, an unofficial Moscow journal. It has become the "organ" (nothing quaint here) of both the broader democratic and the narrower human rights movements. Instead of presenting the issues *ad seriatim*, Reddaway has had the bright idea of arranging the materials topically.

Part 1 is called "The Mirror of the Movement." It features statements of purpose and commitment to impartial reporting. Part 2, "The Mainstream," starts out with the case of Siniavsky and Daniel and takes up the subsequent chain reaction of protests, arrests, demonstrations, and trials in 1968 and 1969. From these events emerged the action group for the defense of civil rights. Part 3, "The Movement in Captivity," brings together laconic, honed, seemingly tested information on arrests, searches, provocations, investigations, trials, sentencing, incarceration, punishments, and hunger strikes of a number of persons, well-known and unknown. It is a descent into the hell political prisoners endure in prisons, camps, and psychiatric establishments. One continues to marvel over the speed and the strategy with which these materials reach the *Chronicle*. Part 4, "Individual Streams," deals with unrest and repression among the minorities and with religious dissent. Part 5, "Mainstream Publications," tells the Solzhenitsyn story and that of *samizdat*. Part 6, "Tributaries," covers dissent in Leningrad as well as in faraway provinces. Themes assembled in the brief last part 7, "Dams," illustrate under the self-evident chapter heading "Stalin, Stalinists, Fascists and Censors" the editor's claim that "part of the courage of the Soviet democrats lies in their recognition of the strong forces ranged against them" (p. 417).

Having dismembered the *Chronicle*, Reddaway puts it all together again by means of a cogent and inobtrusive running commentary. He succeeds in recounting how the *Chronicle's* concern grew from its self-definition to include portraits and hardships of leading dissidents and unsung heroes—from central

events in the capital to the movement's remote tributaries. If this indicates the centrifugal thrust of the book, then its centripetal theme—relentless insistence on law and order, unhingingly un-Berrigan—stands out all the more clearly. Reddaway's introductory essay on the democratic movement itself, for which he claims some two thousand "mainstream" members (p. 23), is excellent. It is informative, concise, and sober.

Much is being said with much agitation about Soviet dissent lately. Discussion spans judgments that it grows by leaps and bounds and that it doesn't amount to much, just a bunch of crazy folks destroying themselves. Discussants include Western observers, old émigrés, and recent Soviet expatriates who had taken part themselves in the democratic movement. Serenity does not characterize the exchange of ideas. Rebukes about oversimplification abound. This puts analytical scalpels to work, slicing the movement into submovements, groups, and subgroups. And it turns especially penumbral when it comes to predicting much or little hope for the movement's momentum and regeneration.

In view of what seems to be currently a stepped-up campaign against dissent (Galanskov's death or murder, Yakir's arrest), it is weird to find, for instance, Iurii Glazov's provocative article on the democratic movement in a recent issue of *Novyi Zhurnal* (no. 109); to read Valerii Chalidze on the opinion page of the *New York Times* (Dec. 5, 1972); and to see various papers announce Zhores Medvedev's departure for London with his wife and son. Quite a number of cumbersome citizens are now abroad. It is a new game, probably connected with the Washington-Kremlin summitry. But its opening gambits do not yet clearly disclose the multipurpose of the new policy. And what it all purports for the movement remains obscure. The regime seems to be testing new pressures on the solidarity of the protesting intelligentsia. That solidarity had marked some sort of recovery of the citizenry after atomization under Stalin; but for that reason, although tenacious, it remains vulnerable. Expatriation to an American university, unlike Siberian exile, may serve to discredit and to emasculate.

All this suggests that *Uncensored Russia* is already dated, that underground materials turn historical very fast—the best reason to study them carefully. As to the evaluation of the forces that shape and twist dissent, the participants themselves, at home and in the new diaspora (cf. the rich and combative *Novyi Kolokol*, London, 1972, edited by Natalia Belinkova) hold a more viable response than most outsiders. The latter frequently straddle glibness and sentimentality. Tact, at any rate, toward matters of decision between life and death, protest and silence, that *others* make is hard to come by.

Replying to a critical reader, the unofficial journal allows: "The *Chronicle* will carry conviction only if its tone is calm and restrained, thus precluding

the possibility of its readers entertaining the slightest doubt as to its legal character" (p. 54). The *Chronicle*, indeed, insists that it "makes every effort to achieve a calm, restrained tone. Unfortunately the materials with which the *Chronicle* is dealing evoke emotional responses, and these automatically affect the tone of the text. The *Chronicle* does, and will do, its utmost to ensure that its strictly factual style is maintained to the greatest degree possible, but it cannot guarantee complete success" (p. 55). It is to Reddaway's credit to have followed suit, to have kept his tone cool in speculation and prediction, to have blended with the spirit of the *Chronicle*. It doesn't matter much, therefore, that on the crucial question of the movement's replacements, one may doubt Reddaway's optimism: "Perhaps Soviet students are now on the move" (p. 33). But what kind of students and on what kind of move, in view of the steady *embourgeoisement* of the mid-strata of that society? What matters is that Reddaway's approach is exploratory, never oracular.

Extensive and painstaking notes connect the *Chronicle* with published materials by Litvinov, Marchenko, Gorbanevskaja, Medvedev, and others. But the most remarkable part of this volume is the illustrations—many photographs and several portrait sketches of prisoners by Iurii Ivanov. At mid-volume, two young men stare right past you from a photograph taken inside a political camp in Mordovia, the only one of its kind to reach the West, according to Reddaway. A dreary winter's birch rises behind the joining curves of the prisoners' arms as they lean against each other. The two stand alone in the prisonscape, shoulder to shoulder. On the next page, Iurii Titov holds onto the window bars of Moscow's Kashchenko Psychiatric Hospital. The brickwork around the window is solid, ornate, having witnessed a thing or two. Galanskov's face seems now especially haunting. And so are the snapshots that show Bogoraz and Litvinov, Grigorenko and Yakhimovich laughing together; or the transformation of Ginzburg from a handsome boy in one photograph to somber manhood in a prison snapshot; or Amalrik perched on top of what seems to be a roll of cable, with his lovely wife gracefully leaning on the contraption. A group of exiles reclining on a meadow under shady trees *u cherta na kulichkakh* blends with crowded farewell tableaux at a Moscow airport (Telesin's and Khavkin's departures). Family albums of yore come to mind and even the fashion in which the *peredvizhniki* had occasionally recorded the serenity of the intelligentsia's determination to stand up.

Dissent seems to be almost the prerogative of the intelligentsia. The non-Russian reader will now find ample help on the subject in recent books closely related to *Uncensored Russia*, such as Abraham Rothberg's *Heirs of Stalin*, dealing in an extensively documented way with dissidence since Stalin's death, and the large collection of various documents and *samizdat* literary works edited by Abraham Brumberg under the title *In Quest of Justice*. The first

book presents the long story of two tumultuous and drab decades of thaws and freezes and suffers somewhat from authorial exegesis, not always convincing. Brumberg's monumental collection synchronizes with *Uncensored Russia*. It embraces essays by Western scholars on various aspects of dissent, documents generated by the trials of 1967 and 1968, and closes with *samizdat* literary criticism, poetry, and prose—the least satisfactory portion of the book for its thinness and arbitrary choice of items. *Uncensored Russia* stands on the special virtue of homogeneous materials, sharply focused, and expertly presented. Just such sober reporting pushes one to reopen the Pandora-boxed questions of the nature and cohesiveness of the Russian and Soviet intelligentsia.

M. O. Gershenzon offered this somewhat romantic and self-serving generalization a long time ago (translation is mine): “When one peers at the character of an average Russian *intelligent*, a typical trait strikes one at once. It is, above all, that of a person who from his youth lives *outside of himself* [italics are Gershenzon's] in the literal sense of the word. This means that he acknowledges as the only worthy object of his interest and concern something that lies outside of his person—the people, society, the state” (*Istoricheskie zapiski*, Moscow, 1910, pp. 153–54). Projected against current meanings and settings, “average” introduces vexing doubts. The tough sobriety of a Nadezhda Mandelstam, of an Arkadii Belinkov, and of the very young Andrei Amalrik seems to be doing a lot of cutting down in the area of the intelligentsia's self-inamoration. It seems, therefore, legitimate, if painful, to ask whether it is an *average* kind of person who stands at the head of the democratic movement or whether, simply, Gershenzon's need and proclivity to call the extraordinary ordinary has been lost. And if the movement consists of a handful of suicidal extremists who are anything but average, who then are the thousands of political prisoners today? (p. 205). It is fascinating to observe how a certain short-circuiting of the intelligentsia's selfless purpose occurs when Glazov, in an essay referred to above, appeals to another weathered and timeless authority on the subject: “As Nikolai Berdiaev correctly wrote, Russia is a country in which lives an Eastern people and a Western intelligentsia” (“Chto takoe demokraticeskoe dvizhenie,” *Novyi Zhurnal*, no. 109, p. 219). Glazov's view of the democratic intelligentsia's isolation blends with the antipopulist symptoms of the recent émigrés which seem to irritate the old emigration. By-passing this kind of gnawing speculation, Julius Telesin, also a member of the movement until his emigration to Israel in 1970, adds in his “Foreword of an Eyewitness” in Reddaway's book a simple and stark dimension to the organizational glossary the *Chronicle* embodies: “The events recorded in the *Chronicle* are for me landmarks on the road of the transformation of many people from apes into men” (p. 51). And it is this transformation

that one remembers after closing the book. Three details may serve as examples.

In the spring of 1968, four men led by one A. Fetisov, an economist, were arrested in Moscow. Representing extreme chauvinism and totalitarian anti-Semitism, they extolled and worshipped the combined memories of Hitler and Stalin. They were accused under article 70, diagnosed as "not answerable," and put away in mental hospitals. A document, highly unflattering to Fetisov and gloating over his misfortune, was thereupon circulated by *samizdat* under the title "He Did Not Recognize His Own." To this the *Chronicle* took strong exception: ". . . one must not forget that four people were sentenced under article 70 for what amounts to *their views* and are now experiencing the dreadful conditions of a special mental hospital, i.e. imprisonment with enforced treatment, *for their views*." The case was so disturbing to the *Chronicle* that it decided to make an exception in its binding policy: ". . . on this occasion the *Chronicle* will abandon its usual practice of not passing judgment." And it passes judgment, indeed, awakening an uneasy feeling of a fallacy *déjà vu*, mixed with admiration for the quixotic categorical imperative, no less *déjà vu*: ". . . to express satisfaction over the fact that the authorities have sent your intellectual opponent to 'a nut house' is immoral. This involves becoming like Fetisov himself, who considered that Sinyavsky and Daniel should have been shot. The author . . . has not given his name, and the result of his anonymity is that the document gives the impression of expressing the views of certain circles of the democratic intelligentsia. This, it must be hoped, is not the case" (pp. 432–33).

On the examination of the Ivan Yakhimovich case (accusations of protesting the trials of Galanskov, Ginzburg, and of others), by the Latvian Supreme Court in 1969, the *Chronicle* reports that the court accepted the defense lawyer's request for a new psychiatric examination of the accused in challenge of two earlier contradictory diagnoses of "schizophrenia" and "psychopathic personality." The *Chronicle* further notes that "Judge Lotko, who presided over the trial, conducted the whole of the two-day hearing with a full observance of procedural norms, and with respect for the accused's right to a defence. According to eyewitnesses, Ivan Yakhimovich aroused the sympathy of all present, not excluding the prosecutor and the escort soldiers" (p. 149). The unusual situation in the Latvian Supreme Court did not help the accused much. He was sentenced to compulsory treatment in a mental hospital anyway.

As fleetingly as that of the Latvian judge, the faceless image surfaces of one Dmitrienko, duty warder in a Perm Region camp where Marchenko was resented, once more, to yet another two-year stretch of strict regime. This happened in 1969 because he had made statements critical of the invasion

of Czechoslovakia and, among other things, had blamed the Soviet Union for the clashes on the Sino-Soviet border. Most injuriously and specifically, though, he was supposed to have declared, "The communists have drunk all my blood." And he was supposed to have made this declaration in special circumstances, namely, from within the punishment cell. This particular charge was based on the testimony of two punishment-cell warders. Since the two were found flagrantly contradicting each other in their evidence, the KGB security officer in charge of this case had to look around for more "material" on Marchenko. He managed. Criminal proceedings against Marchenko were instituted by the KGB agent in due time. The "blood drinking" charge was corroborated at the pretrial investigation by duty warders Sedov and Dmitrienko. So far, so good. At last, the trial took place. Sedov was not summoned to appear. But his testimony was recorded just the same, "in violation of the law," as the *Chronicle* remarks, "and also incorporated into the verdict." As to the second duty warder, the key witness Dmitrienko, he "declared at the trial that he had not known Marchenko before, and had 'decided' that the statement attributed to him in the charge had been uttered by him, but now that he had seen Marchenko at the trial and heard his voice, he was firmly convinced that Marchenko had not spoken these words. Moreover, Dmitrienko declared that he knew who had spoken the words; and he could name the man and summon him to court. The court did not react to this declaration, and ignored Dmitrienko's testimony in the verdict, although a court is obliged by law to explain why it has rejected any testimony which contradicts the conclusions reached in the verdict. Fellow-prisoners of Marchenko in the punishment cell, summoned to court at his request, stated that they had not heard the sentence he was charged with uttering" (pp. 195-96).